

# National Park Service Transportation Reauthorization White Paper: 2013

*“Restore, Sustain, and Innovate”*

## Mission and Goals

The Organic Act of 1916 is the foundation for what the NPS stands for since the beginning. From: The National Park Service (NPS) Organic Act of 1916:

*“The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”*

In 1916, the population of the United States was 102 million. Today, the population of the U.S. exceeds 315 million, roughly triple the 1916 level; the projected population for 2050 is projected to be 400 million. Similarly, visitation to NPS sites has increased dramatically during the NPS’s nearly 100-year-history, from thousands of visitors in 1916 to a forecast of some 285 million visitors in 2013. International visitation is growing as well. The demand on the NPS transportation system has grown significantly, and will continue to grow into the future.

The national park system comprises 401 sites covering more than 84 million acres in nearly every state, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. These areas include national parks, monuments, battlefields, military parks, historical parks, historic sites, lakeshores, seashores, recreation areas, scenic rivers and trails, parkways, and the White House. In every case, visitors need to be provided access, compelling the NPS to address transportation in order to fulfill its primary mission.

Meanwhile, access alone is instrumental, but providing in a manner that leaves the resource unimpaired is critical to the mission of the National Park Service.

Due to the accelerated deadline imposed by the Federal Highway Administration, field discussion and comments were intense and engaged. This paper was generated in close collaboration with the seven (7) NPS regions across the country. NPS provides the White Paper as a snap shot based on today’s information; we see this as a living document which will incorporate future discovery of needs in concert with the field and users. Accordingly, the NPS asks that the document be a starting point for discussions and be open for adjustments and changes. Therefore, the NPS requests additional opportunities to more fully articulate our needs as we developed future deliverables such as the comprehensive “Resource Paper” due the end of May 2013.

## **The National Park Service Transportation Mission**

Preserve and protect resources, while providing safe and enjoyable access to and within the national parks using sustainable, appropriate, integrated transportation solutions.

### **Goals**

- Provide and maintain high quality transportation infrastructure and services.
- Deliver safe, efficient, effective, and environmentally friendly transportation infrastructure projects and services.
- Demonstrate leadership and innovation in transportation, as well as in cooperating with local, regional, state, Federal and industry partners.

The people of the United States have entrusted to the NPS the care and keeping of our most treasured places, the places of natural wonders and the places of significance to our history as a Nation. It is the duty and responsibility of the Federal government—through the work of the NPS—to provide the requisite care needed to fulfill this trust.

## **Federal Lands Transportation Program and NPS**

Since the 1920's the National Park Service has had a strong partnership with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in the planning, design, construction and maintenance of the Park Service's transportation facilities. In accordance with Congress's efforts to meet the federal government's responsibility for transportation in federal lands, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU, 2005) continued a legacy of program authorizations which started in 1982. Although the funding was increased over prior years it was not sufficient to fully address road and bridge conditions, complete congressionally mandated parkways, expand alternative transportation services, employ intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and restore trails.

Additionally, the PRPP did not fully realize the amounts authorized by SAFETEA-LU due to the obligation ceiling on highway trust fund spending under Title 23, Section 1102(f). The result was the loss of \$20 million of PRPP funds each year from the SAFETEA-LU authorized levels. This equated to a \$100 million shortfall over the life of SAFETEA-LU, and resulted in the deferral of 5 to 15 construction projects that would otherwise have been completed.

During 2009, the NPS benefitted from an additional \$170 million from the Federal Lands Highways Program (FLHP) American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) appropriation (P.L. 111-5), and an additional \$148 million from the NPS ARRA appropriation. More than 50 major road and bridge rehabilitation projects were funded. This one-time boost in funding allowed the NPS to maintain the condition of its road network during the SAFETEA-LU period.

Subsequent to SAFETEA-LU, two years of continuing resolutions maintained PRPP funding at approximately the \$240 million authorized level. In 2012, the Federal transportation program was reauthorized, and the FLHP and PRPP were reorganized by the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) act (P.L. 112-141). MAP-21 created a new Federal Lands

Transportation Program (FLTP) incorporating the PRPP, and provided \$240 million per year to the NPS for two years.

MAP-21 repealed many programs, some of which had previously provided funding for NPS transportation projects, including the Paul S. Sarbanes Transit in Parks Program (TRIP), and the Public Lands Highway Discretionary, Transportation Enhancements, and the National Scenic Byways Programs. The net result is a reduction (of approximately \$1 billion) in Federal funding for the NPS transportation system over the life of SAFETEAU. If the program funding levels remain flat (\$240 million authorized annually), the NPS transportation system will continue to experience a slow but steady decline in condition. Although MAP-21 repealed many programs, it continued the Emergency Relief for Federally Owned (ERFO). This program continues to be critical to the care of the NPS transportation facilities following natural disasters. For example, a special appropriation of \$27 million helps to rebuild the parks transportation facilities throughout the Northeast following Hurricane Sandy.

Without additional funding, congressionally mandated projects will still not be completed, improved transportation access and services for park visitors will not be achieved, transit and ITS will not be deployed to reduce congestion and trails will not be restored.

## **NPS Transportation System**

The Service owns and operates approximately 5,500 paved miles of park roads that are open to the public, the equivalent of 860 paved miles of parking areas, 4,100 miles of unpaved roads that are open to the public, 1,414 bridges, and 63 tunnels.

In addition to roads, bridges and tunnels, the NPS has 148 surface Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) operating in 84 park units, utilizing trolleys, rail systems, canal boats, ferries, tour boats, cable cars, snow coaches, trams, buses and vans. There are an additional 14 aviation systems in 4 units.

The NPS has more than 18,600 miles of trails, of which 690 miles (4%) are paved.

Deferred maintenance of the paved roads and bridges is estimated at \$5.1 billion and having a current replacement value of \$30 billion.

The NPS paved road network (publically accessible paved roads, not including parking areas) is currently in fair condition an accomplishment of increased funding of ARRA and practicing sound asset management with the philosophy of the U.S. Department of Transportation's "fix-it-first" and an aggressive preventative maintenance program before building new. The 2012 network Pavement Condition Rating (PCR), an FHWA developed industry-standard condition metric, is 80 (which indicates a network wide fair condition). The ideal condition under sound asset management practices would be to maintain the system at a PCR of 85. Absent additional funding, the network condition will continue to decline and future efforts to revitalize it will be even more expensive.

The bridge inventory is still in good condition with an industry standard Bridge Health Index of 0.92, though that places it on the border of fair. The inventory condition has slowly declined since 2004. Additionally, the NPS inventory is aging and faces a "wave" of bridges built in the

1940s, 1950s, and 1960s that will be firmly in the second half of their service lives and will require increasingly greater funds to maintain and reconstruct.

## **Economic Benefits<sup>1</sup>**

The National Park Service units across the country are some of this country's biggest tourist attractions for those vacationing in the states and for international tourist. The National Park Service wishes to do our part to reignite this country's economic engine through tourism and jobs. Providing safe and sound access in and around these points of destination is the first step towards this end.

While the NPS mission does not include creating economic benefits the economic benefits to local communities from national park related activities is significant.

The National Park System received 278.9 million recreation visits in 2011. Park visitors spent \$12.95 billion in local gateway regions (within roughly 60 miles of the park). Visitors staying overnight outside the park (in motels, hotels, cabins, and bed and breakfasts) accounted for 54.9% of the total spending. About half (48%) of the spending was for lodging and meals, 21.4% for gas and local transportation, 9.7% for recreation and entertainment, 8.1% for groceries, and 12.7% for other retail purchases.

The contribution of this park visitor spending to the national economy amounted to 251,600 jobs, \$9.34 billion in labor income, and \$16.50 billion in value added. The direct effects of visitor spending are measured at the local level in gateway regions around national parks. Local economic impacts were estimated after excluding spending by park visitors from the local area (9.8% of the total spending). Combining local impacts across all parks yielded a total local impact (including direct and secondary effects) of 162,400 jobs, \$4.58 billion in labor income, and \$8.15 billion value added.

The four local economic sectors most directly affected by non-local visitor spending are lodging, restaurants, retail trade, and recreation and entertainment. Their spending supported 45,200 jobs in restaurants and bars, 34,100 jobs in lodging sectors, 15,500 jobs in retail and wholesale trade, and 20,000 jobs in recreation and entertainment.

Parks also impact the local and national economies through the NPS payroll.<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year 2010 the National Park Service employed 26,031 people with a total payroll of \$1.71 billion in wages, salaries, and payroll benefits. Including the induced effects of the spending of NPS wages and salaries in the local region, the total local economic impacts of park payrolls are \$1.95 billion in labor income, \$2.16 billion in value added, and 32,407 jobs (including NPS jobs). The impacts of the park payroll on the national economy are \$2.41 billion in labor income, \$2.96 billion in value added, and 41,700 jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> *Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation, 2011*. Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/ARD/NRR-2013/632. National Park Service, Ft. Collins, CO, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Economic Benefits to Local Communities from National Park Visitation and Payroll, 2010*. Natural Resources Report NPS/NRSS/EQD/NRR - 2011/481, National Park Service, Ft. Collins, CO, 2011.

Combining the impacts of non-local visitor spending and NPS payroll-related spending yields a total impact of 300,000 jobs nationally, of which 189,000 are in the local regions around national parks.

## **Challenges and Opportunities: Restore, Sustain, and Innovate**

The NPS transportation system is made up of infrastructure and services spread across the entire country. In meeting the Federal responsibility, this system is intended to support the NPS mission by providing safe access for the public while at the same time protecting park resources. Together with its partner, the Federal Highway Administration, the NPS has worked to address this challenge. With the support of the Federal Lands Transportation Program, the NPS continues to improve on asset-management approach that both preserves its transportation system and protects its natural and cultural resources.

Meanwhile, the NPS transportation network is deteriorating. At current funding levels, the percentage of the NPS roads and bridges in good condition continues to decline, and the NPS is struggling to sustain its alternative transportation systems. Also, the current funding level limits the development of new or expanded systems and services to provide public access to and within park resources. Traffic safety problems and congestion continue to be a challenge in the national parks. Action is needed to address these immediate problems, while at the same time preparing for the future.

The NPS seeks to **restore** its existing infrastructure to good condition and keep it there; **sustain** its alternative transportation systems and services; and—through planning and implementation—**innovate** to improve its transportation system to best serve the American people going forward. This will be done in a way that protects the resources of the national park system.

For the upcoming reauthorization of the Federal transportation program, the NPS has developed three broad themes to define and support its proposed efforts:

**Theme 1: Sound Asset Management.** Based on an extensive inventory and analysis program over the past 15 years, the NPS transportation program managers know the assets and services that comprise its system, the condition of that system, the actions required to bring the system up to the level of “good condition,” and the efforts needed to sustain desired levels of service into the future. By applying the principles of sound asset management, including a sophisticated pavement preservation system, the NPS knows the most cost-effective and efficient way to achieve and maintain good condition of its infrastructure. The NPS challenge is to secure the Federal Lands Transportation Program funds required to implement the required actions of its core program:

- Bring all roads to 85 PCR (“good”) condition in six years
- Maintain all bridges at current (“good”) condition
- Sustain Alternative Transportation Systems

**Proposed Annual Funding: \$470 million**

**Theme 2: Address the “Big Needs.”** In addition to the funds required to keep the NPS transportation system and services functioning, the NPS faces some project funding challenges that are beyond the capacity of the current core program. These projects are of such a size as to exceed the funds available annually to the Regions in which these projects are located and, in some cases, exceed the funds currently available to the entire NPS transportation program on an annual basis. Similar to Tiger Grants, federal land agency projects of national and regional significance require unique support. Such “Big Needs” fall into several categories:

- Specialized “big ticket” needs: Many transportation needs can be addressed by breaking large projects into segments or phases, and then constructing them over time as funds become available. However, there are some big projects that cannot be managed this way. When it comes time to replace the MV-Ranger III ship that provides the primary access to Isle Royale National Park (\$25-\$35 million), or to reconstruct Memorial Bridge across the Potomac River (\$128-\$244 million), the cost must be dealt with as a lump sum. Across the country there are large projects beyond annual budgets, for example, Yellowstone National Park’s roads reconstruction (over \$180 million) and transportation realignment and eroding stream channels at Lake Mead National Recreation Area (range from \$22.3 million to \$84 million)
- Gaps to complete: Some projects have been undertaken in phases or segments ... but over time, they still remain incomplete. This includes such congressionally mandated projects as the Foothills Parkway (\$420 million), and the Natchez Trace Multi-Use Trail (\$102 million).
- Large external projects: Periodically, other projects emerge in response to current priorities or agreements independent of the NPS transportation program focus on asset management, such as the Tamiami Trail (\$285 million) or the Manassas National Battlefield Bypass (\$183 million).
- New, system-wide or Region-wide initiatives: based on careful analysis and detailed planning, opportunities are sometimes identified for Region-wide action such as the NER’s proposal to enhance multi-modal access across the region (\$58-\$94 million), service-wide safety program (\$50 million), or the implementation of the AKR long-range transportation plan in conjunction with its partnering Federal land management agencies (\$25-\$35 million).

**Proposed Annual Funding: \$150M**

**Theme 3: Management Systems and Long-Range Planning.** For more than a decade, the NPS transportation program has been investing significant resources to establish and sustain a set of management systems to monitor the condition and performance of its transportation assets and services. This investment is paying dividends by helping NPS and its partner, FHWA, determine the most cost-effective ways to utilize and apply available funds.

Theme 3 continues to support ongoing investment in major management systems, and data collection and analysis including:

- Bridge Management System (information that allows the NPS to include project cost effectiveness and network performance in bridge repair or rehabilitation decisions)
- Pavement Management System (information that allows the NPS to include project cost effectiveness and network performance in pavement resurfacing, repair, or rehabilitation decisions)
- Congestion Management System
- Safety Management System
- NPS Traffic Data Program
- Road Inventory Program
- Bridge Inspection Program
- Transportation Data Integration
- Transportation Geographic Information Systems
- Roads Working Group
- Alternative Transportation System (ATS) Study (financial sustainability of ATSS principally owned and operated by the NPS)
- MAP-21 Bike Side Path Facilities Inventory & Condition Assessment,
- ATS Facilities Inventory
- Specialized Regional Planning Support

Also, the NPS has been using a portion of its funds to complete a national Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the National Park Service, and five (5) out of seven (7) regional LRTPs. This planning effort will continue to define the NPS transportation needs and services over the coming decades and help plot a course for adapting to future demands and constraints. In addition, there in

**Proposed Annual Funding: \$25M**

## **Proposed Changes to MAP-21**

These comments and proposed changes are based on the assumption that the framework for the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) set forth in MAP-21 will be used in the next reauthorization.

The passage of MAP-21 resulted in a net reduction of Federal transportation Trust Funds for the National Park Service. While essentially maintaining the SAFETEA-LU annual funding level for the NPS in the new Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP), MAP-21 eliminated the Transit in Parks (TRIP) program, the Public Lands Highways Discretionary (PLHD) program, and the Transportation Enhancements and National Scenic Byways programs.

The NPS transportation has also had to meet the challenges with new legislative constraints imposed by MAP-21, including the 5% cap on expenditures for management systems, data collection, and planning, and the \$10 million ceiling on environmental mitigation by all Federal Land Management Agencies (FLMAs).

Another provision in MAP-21 requires FLMAs to prohibit the use of bicycles on public roads under their jurisdiction if the posted speed limit is 30 mph or above and there is a multi-use trail within 100 yards.

The NPS proposes the following changes to the MAP-21 legislation as part of the reauthorization process:

1. Eliminate the 5% cap on management systems, data collection, and planning. This limitation has added overhead costs to the management of the program, has placed an arbitrary limitation on the work required to implement the new, mandated performance-based procedures, and is unnecessary for the professional management of the program. The NPS can provide historic and projected rates for such management items that will better explain and justify the resources needed to comply with ongoing operations and any new reauthorization directives.
2. Eliminate the \$10 million ceiling on environmental mitigation. Like the 5% cap, no analysis or justification was offered to explain this action. Given the missions of the various FLMAs and the requirements placed on them to protect resources and to address the safety of the traveling public, this is a contradictory action that arbitrarily limits the cost-effective inclusion of achievable solutions in on-going projects.
3. Repeal the prohibition on bicycle use of public roads. No State has such a provision. And, as with the two previous items, no justification or explanation was provided for enactment of this directive that might suggest that there is a definitive, broad concern across the entire transportation system that FLMAs manage. Under current law, it will require legislative changes to 36 USC to implement this action.
4. Make changes to the Federal Lands Access Program:
  - a. Identify in the legislation a FLMA representative to participate in the deliberations of each Programming Decision Committee as a member of an FLMA advisory team;
  - b. Adjust the FLAP formula to equitably distribute the funds across all states
  - c. Change the rules so that FLMA- owned and/or maintained facilities may be funded by FLAP since some projects have components both inside and outside the FLMA boundaries. Allow a project that is contiguous that transverse and/or adjacent to a boundary to count as the match regardless of ownership;
  - d. NPS business model for financially successful and sustainable transit systems include nongovernmental agencies. Allow for the eligibility of nongovernmental agencies to participate in the ownership and maintenance of transportation assets and facilities; and

- e. Provide a uniform definition of high-use Federal recreation sites and Federal economic generators that can be equitably applied for any FLMA site on a per visit and per capita basis.
5. Add an explicit requirement that the Secretary of department over each FLMA be consulted by the Secretary of Transportation on the management and administration of the FLTP. No one Secretary shall override another Secretary's authority. In the spirit of formal agreements between FHWA and the FLMAs that have long been used to cooperatively and collaboratively create, maintain, and improve the transportation system and governance now in use, the NPS asks for a philosophical shift from the approach that was imposed by the MAP-21 legislation.
6. Review and revise recent changes to procedures for the review and approval of environmental impact/protection to ensure that the mission of the FLMAs is not compromised. Include in the legislation in the Federal Lands Transportation Program section specific language to address the review and approval of environmental impact/protection documents for Title 23 and 49, requiring concurrence by appropriate Federal Land Management Agency Secretary. This approach cuts red tape and will improve the efficiency, effectiveness and stop duplication of costs to deliver construction projects compliance.

Additional information on the importance of the Federal Lands Transportation Program to the National Park Service can be found at: <http://www.nps.gov/transportation/index.html>.